

The Questions Authors Ask: A Survey of Three Peer-Reviewed Journals

Meghan McDevitt, Managing Editor¹, Stephanie Kinnan, Assistant Managing Editor of Clinical Publications², Jeannine Botos, PhD³, Scientific Managing Editor, Rebecca Hammer, Senior Editorial Assistant¹, Rebecca Lindeman, Senior Editorial Assistant¹, Joshua Varnell, JNCI Editorial Assistant⁴, Deborah Bowman, MFA, ELS, Senior Managing Editor of Clinical Publications²

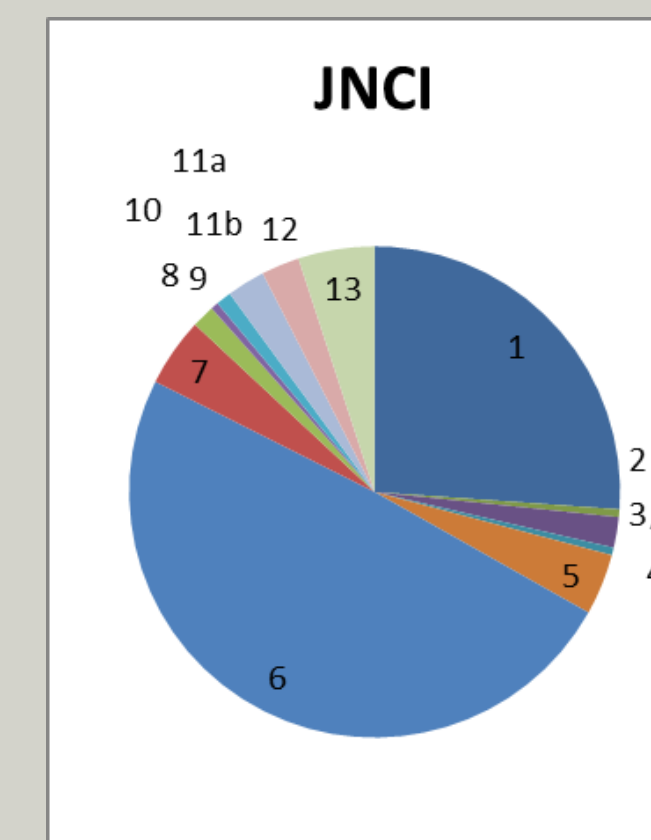
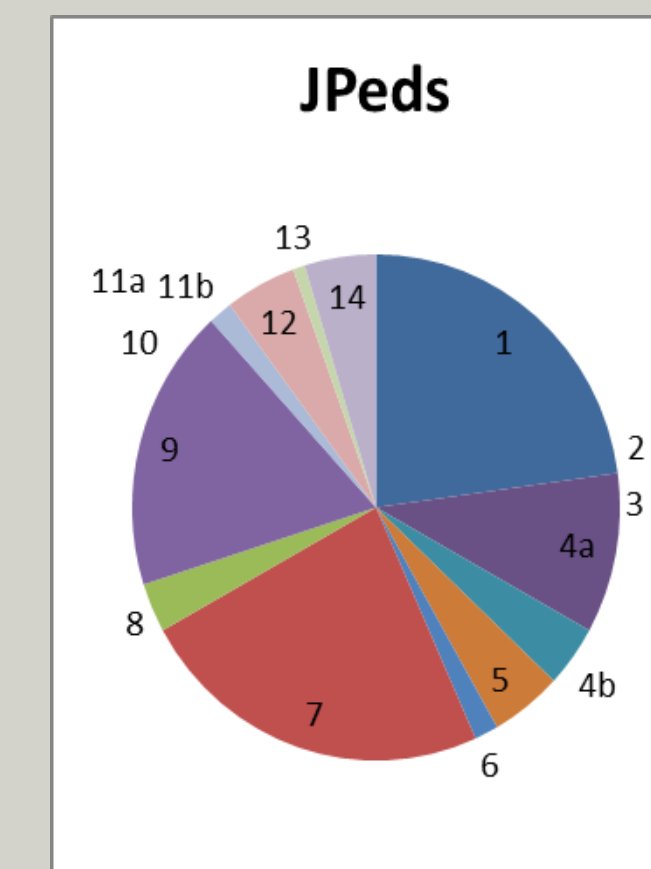
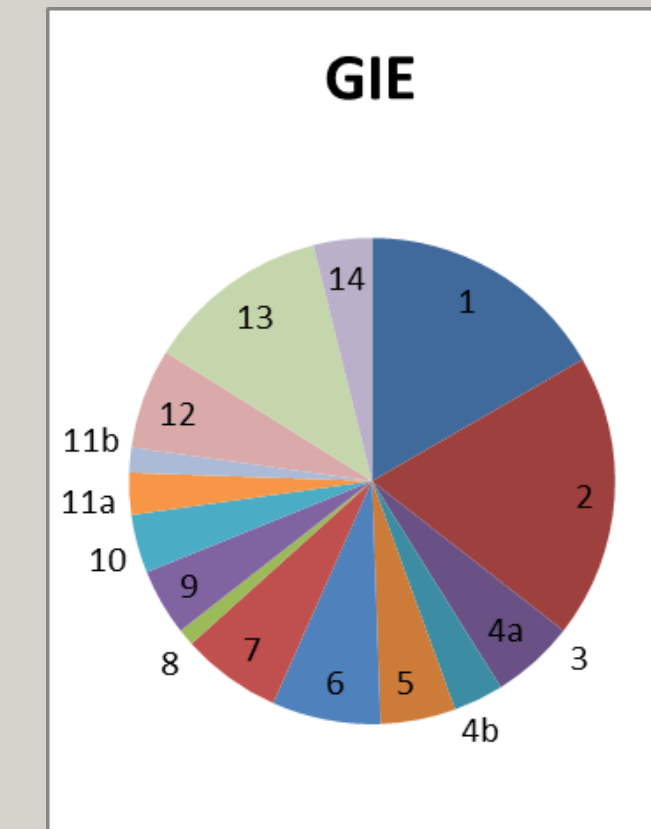
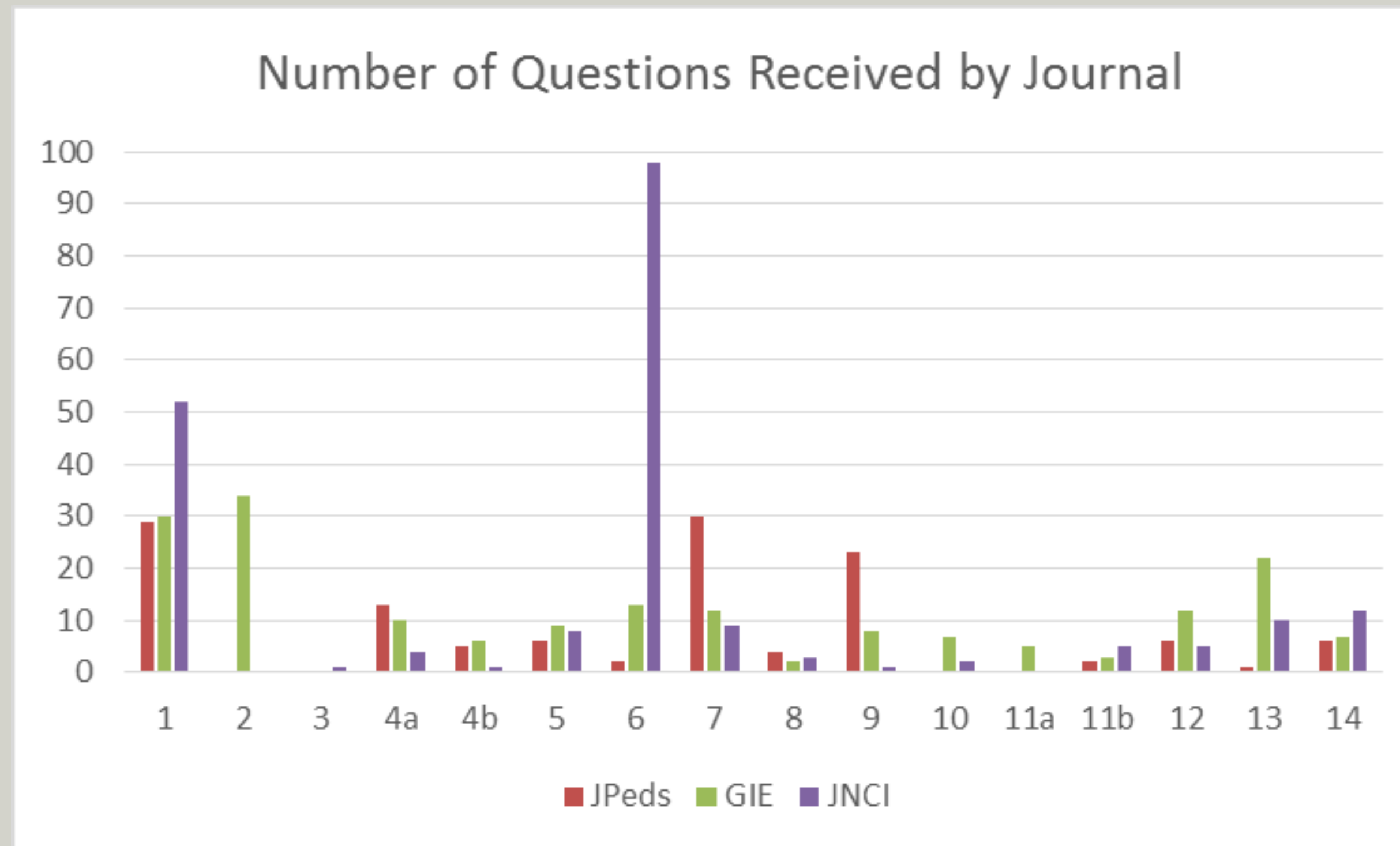
¹The Journal of Pediatrics, Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center; ²American Society for Gastrointestinal Endoscopy; ³JNCI: Journal of the National Cancer Institute, Oxford University Press; ⁴J&J Editorial

Aims

We aimed to identify the most common types of questions authors ask editorial offices and determine whether these vary based on the journal.

Process

We collected data on questions submitted by authors to three peer-reviewed journals between February 1 and April 30, 2018. The three peer-reviewed journals included were *Gastrointestinal Endoscopy (GIE)*, *The Journal of Pediatrics*, and *JNCI: Journal of the National Cancer Institute*. A list of 14 question categories was prepared for data collection. Majority consensus was used as needed to resolve doubt about whether a follow-up question was considered a new inquiry.



GIE's aberrant data falls in the Ethics category, which includes disclosures/COIs. We believe this occurred because during the data accumulation period, we implemented a new policy of sending our COI form by email to each author upon article acceptance, asking for COI updates. The result has been a flood of questions concerning COIs and emails from authors whose COIs had not been disclosed accurately. After reviewing the nature of the inquiries and receiving feedback, we anticipate that this number will fall when authors get used to the new policy.

The Journal of Pediatrics received the most questions about article proposals and revision extensions. Several article types require pre-submission approval, so it is difficult to prevent these questions although we could consider working the pre-approval process into our submission system. For extending revision deadlines, we currently ask authors to submit their revised manuscript within 4 weeks. We could consider extending this deadline (6 weeks) or investigate the possibility of sending reminders.

JNCI's most common inquiries were related to authorship confirmation, as we require that all authors verify authorship at initial submission. Often, these emails are not received or are filtered as spam resulting in numerous queries from authors. The most common reason for emails not being received is institution email filters. Other issues encountered are incorrect or outdated addresses or typographical errors resulting in undeliverable emails. Perhaps if we moved the authorship requirement to revision, this would limit the number of queries received. Another potential solution would be to add language in Editorial Manager and the Instructions to Authors to let authors know to ask their IT department to add the @editorialmanager.com domain to their server settings, and to add em@editorialmanager.com to their contacts list to ensure our communications are not filtered as spam.

Discussion

The most common questions received across the three journals were related to manuscript preparation and formatting. Because every journal has unique formatting and submission requirements, manuscript preparation can be frustrating for authors especially if they submit to more than one journal. Each journal also selected one category for which they received more questions than the other two journals to investigate. Each journal speculated about why it received more questions for that category and feedback was shared among the journals.

Conclusion

We discussed possible solutions to address the volume of questions received related to manuscript preparation and formatting. As a possible solution, a standard list of essential requirements could be developed that all journals could use. Additionally, because most journal author instructions are long and detailed, we thought a visually appealing quick start guide or cheat sheet with simplified instructions could be helpful.

Do you have a suggestion that can help us address these FAQs? Share your thoughts through the ISMTE Conference app!



Category	Description
1	Manuscript preparation and formatting (article types accepted and article type requirements, word count, page count, abstract format, limits to the number of figures/tables, how to find author instructions, how to submit, Articles sent back for formatting or missing components)
2	Ethics (IRB approval, trial registration, disclosures/COIs, funding sources, response to ethical concerns--overlap in text)
3	Cost (fee to submit or publish, color fee)
4a	Submission status pre-acceptance
4b	Submission status post-acceptance (time to publication, when will proofs be received, appearance on PubMed)
5	Technical difficulties with submission system
6	Authorship (number of authors, changes to author list, changes to corresponding author)
7	Article proposal / submission inquiry (authors emailing office abstracts, asking "is this worth submitting?")
8	Rejection rebuttal
9	Extensions on revision
10	Questions about reviewer comments
11a	Correction after acceptance, before proof
11b	Correction after publication
12	Post-acceptance correspondence (social media, author interviews/podcasts, press releases, etc)
13	Question about invited articles (Editorials, replies to letters to the editor)
14	Other